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SUBJECT: RUSSIA'S "AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE" TO ABKHAZIA

REVIEWS OCTOBER 15 CONFERENCE, SECURITY CONCERNS

Classified By: Acting POL M/C David Kostelancik. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. While noting concerns over the collapse of the October 15 talks, the newly-named Russian "Ambassador" to Abkhazia sees the fact the meeting took place at all as positive and a step towards fulfilling point six of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan. The GOR is concerned that the security situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia is not improving, and has invited EU envoy Morel to visit Moscow by the end of the month to discuss coordination of the different peacekeeping and monitoring missions in the area, with the intent of continuing the talks during the November 18 meeting. As Russian troops in the two zones are not trained in peacekeeping or policing and have no experience in working with international observers, the MOD is considering creating small "contact groups" of Russian troops, peacekeepers and civilians to interact with the EU and other monitors. While noting that some ethnic Georgian refugees are returning to their homes in the conflict zones, the MFA notes the issue of refugee property in Abkhazia is a major problem, and is advising Russians not to invest in it and urging the Abkhaz leaders to address the issue. End summary.

New "Ambassador" to Abkhazia, Abkhaz Property

¶12. (C) MFA Deputy Director for the 4th CIS Department Semyon Grigoriev told us October 21 that press reports about his appointment as Russia's "ambassador" to Abkhazia were a bit premature, as the decree had not yet been finalized. Still, he acknowledged the appointment was likely to go through and he expected to take up his post in Sukhumi at the beginning of the new year, as Moscow still needed to find a location for the new Embassy and acquire staff. In response to our question about press reports that Russians were buying property in Abkhazia that belonged to Georgian refugees, he insisted the GOR was scrupulously avoiding any property that had questionable ownership, and was advising Russian businesses and individuals not to invest in such properties. Characterizing this as "the main issue" in Abkhazia, Grigoriev said the GOR had urged the Abkhaz leadership to make a full analysis of all property and sort it into property belonging to refugees and other property.

October 15 Meeting Seen as More Positive than Initially

¶13. (C) Grigoriev said that, a week after the October 15 meeting in Geneva, "emotions had cooled," and Russia now had a more positive assessment of the conference. Noting that it had been very difficult to hold the meeting at all, Grigoriev said Moscow believed it was important that the process had started and was satisfied the meeting had taken place. It

had begun the realization of point six of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan.

¶ 14. (C) Commenting that Russia believed the issue of representation at the meeting had been worked out with the EU and the other participants, Grigoriev said DFM Karasin and 4th CIS Director Kelin had been "surprised" by the Abkhaz and South Ossetian positions on participation. He stressed that the GOR had not promised the two delegations that they would be represented at the same level as the other delegations.

November 18 Meeting - Security Issues, Format, Arms Embargo

¶ 15. (C) While acknowledging the challenge of finding a workable format for the November 18 meeting, Grigoriev said it was essential because of the need to resolve security issues in the two zones. Russia was distressed that the working group had not taken place in Geneva on October 15 because the security situation was not improving. After the failure in Geneva, FM Lavrov had proposed to Solana and Morel that Morel visit Moscow by the end of the month to begin the discussion. The main problem was that Russia had no more peacekeepers in the zones, and the Russian troops there were not trained in peacekeeping or policing and had no experience in working with international observers. The Russian MOD was considering creating small "contact groups" of Russian troops, peacekeepers and civilians to interact with the EU and other monitors. The EU monitors, he noted without irony, were "just observing, not intervening." (note: at a news conference October 22, FM Lavrov said the EU observers, "as

MOSCOW 00003114 002 OF 002

guarantors of the non-use of force against South Ossetia and Abkhazia," should work more actively to prevent "acts of provocation from Georgia.") Grigoriev said the GOR wanted to discuss these issues, as well as coordination of all the different peacekeeping and monitoring missions in the area, with the EU.

¶ 16. (C) As to format, the GOR had told Morel that if the Georgian participants were characterized as representatives of a state, the Abkhaz and South Ossetians should be too. This would solve another issue with the October 15 meeting; the participation of the "Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives in exile." If all three participated as independent "states," Georgia could include in its delegation whomever it wished. In response to our question how this was possible, given that none of the other participants had recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "states," Grigoriev admitted he did not know. He said the GOR would nonetheless continue to work with the two regions' leaders to make their approach "more balanced." But Russia expected Georgia also to take steps to compromise, e.g., by not including "Georgian exiles" in their delegations. Russia accepted that, given the break-down of the October 15 meeting, the series of talks might not conclude before the end of the year.

¶ 17. (C) When asked about press reports on Russia's call for an arms embargo on Georgia, Grigoriev said Russia had some proposals on the non-militarization of Georgia, which it intended to raise in Geneva.

Return of Refugees/IDPs

¶ 18. (C) Agreeing that one of the working groups should address refugee/IDP return, Grigoriev said he had received reports that about 300 ethnic Georgians had returned to their homes in the Kodori region in Abkhazia. In South Ossetia, there were some ethnic Georgians returning to their villages, but it was a problem because there was no functioning government in South Ossetia to assist with refugee returns. The GOR, Grigoriev said, had tried to persuade the South Ossetian leaders to accept international aid and refugee agencies' assistance, including that coming in from the Georgian as

well as the Russian sides. But, they would only accept aid targeted for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, not assistance that was designated as "aid for Georgia."

BEYRLE